DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 179 938 CS 005 163

AUTHOR Jordan, Alice W.
TITLE An Analysis of Program Selection Using the Right to Read Group Problem Solving Process.
INSTITUTION Washington Office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Olympia.
SPONS AGENCY National Inst. of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C. Dissemination and Resources Group.
PUB DATE 1 Aug 79
CONTRACT 400-76-0092
NOTE 15p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Secondary Education; *Evaluation Methods; *Program Evaluation; Program Improvement; *Reading Programs; Reading Research
IDENTIFIERS Linking Agents; Northwest Reading Consortium; *Research and Development Utilization Program; *Right to Read

ABSTRACT

The extent to which 36 schools participating in the Northwest Reading Consortium adhered to the use of the Right to Read assessment and planning procedure as a means of identifying and implementing needed improvements in their reading programs is analyzed in this report. The report concludes that there was a high correlation between use of the Right to Read procedure and selection and implementation of reading improvement programs in schools where the procedure was faithfully applied, where the principal took an active leadership role in the task force meetings, where the building-based task force had the support of the district administration, and where conditions for change and improvement were generally positive. (FL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED179938

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

AN ANALYSIS OF PROGRAM SELECTION USING THE RIGHT TO READ GROUP PROBLEM SOLVING PROCESS

Alice W. Jordan
Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

and

Northwest Reading Consortium
Superintendent of Public Instruction
Olympia, Washington
August 1, 1979

CS005163

This report was prepared by the author under contract No. 400-76-0092 with the National Institute of Education and is not necessarily endorsed by that agency.

This is a publication of the Instructional and Professional Services Division of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, Olympia, Washington 98504

Dr. Frank B. Brouillet
Superintendent of Public Instruction

Dr. Jack Frisk
Deputy Superintendent

Dr. Monica Schmidt
Assistant Superintendent
Division of Instructional and Professional Services

Dr. Alfred Rasp, Jr.
Director
Testing and Evaluation

Dr. Albert R. Haugerud
Director
Northwest Reading Consortium

Dr. Harry W. Johnson II
Evaluator
Northwest Reading Consortium

The author expresses her appreciation to Albert Haugerud for his conceptualization of this analysis and his editing of a draft copy. Thanks are also due Mark Coffey for his assistance in the collection of data.

AN ANALYSIS OF PROGRAM SELECTION

USING THE RIGHT TO READ PROBLEM SOLVING PROCESS

One of the objectives of the Northwest Reading Consortium (NRC) was to assist 36 public schools in four states in the selection of an appropriate Research and Development (R&D) based innovation to improve reading programs. It was a stated goal of the Project to study not only the use of R&D results but the process of change itself. To accomplish these goals the NRC used the Right to Read (R2R) assessment and planning procedures as the problem-solving process model. The Right to Read Assessment and Planning Handbook was designed as a program review and planning guide (distributed by U.S.O.E.) for use by a committee or task force for collecting data and making decisions about reading programs. The project model also prescribed the review of a data bank called the Knowledge Base in the program selection process. (This data bank is a compendium of printed summaries and collections of research based reading materials and methods validated by the NRC and compiled by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.) Serious review of the Knowledge Base is defined as consultant and/or building task force study of program descriptor sheets, and subsequent study of program overviews, teacher guides, sample materials and evaluation data for several selected programs. If, after following these procedures, a task force was unable to find a match between its selection criteria and a Research and Development innovation, further Project support of activities was contingent upon either approved program evaluation plan as a means of validating an alternative or additional planning on aspects of the problem having potential for research and development solutions. In each state an educational consultant or facilitator worked closely with each site in the four phases of the Project: problem identification, solution selection, implementation planning and installation of the innovation selected.

It is the intent of this paper to analyze the fidelity to this model through the solution selection phase of the curriculum change process.

Adherence to the Model

The first question is: Did the schools follow the model described above? This analysis showed that 44% of the schools adhered to the prescribed solution selection process throughout the planning cycle and 56% did not. A site's "adherence" to the model was assessed by review of the educational facilitator's documentation of his/her activities and also by informal interview of project staff who had visited the schools and worked closely with the facilitator. The latter process indicated that the completion of the required documentation of the problem-solving process and of Right to Read charts was a pro forma compliance for a few sites and lacked the facilitator's or task force's commitment to both using the Right to Read process and seriously considering the Knowledge Base of materials. Thus the definition of "adherence to the model" is used herein to include only those schools who adhered to both the "spirit and the letter" of the model described above.

Of the 21 sites who were judged as not adhering to the model, only three or 15% selected a validated Research and Development program: whereas, of those who were seen as adhering to the model 12 or 75% selected research based validated innovations. A Chi Square test of the relationship between adhering to the Project model and selecting an R&D innovation showed a statistically significant difference in solution selection between those who adhered to the model and those who did not ($p < .01$). Such a clear relationship between the combined use of the proposed group problem solving process and the Knowledge Base and the subsequent selection of a validated R&D innovation supports the use of this model in R&D utilization programs. Although many hypotheses might be offered to

explain the relationship between following this model and selecting an R&D program, it appears more complex than a simple linear or casual relationship. The success of this model in leading the user to an R&D innovation can only be interpreted within the total context of this Project, where adherence to the model was not as widespread as anticipated in project plans.

Fifty-six percent of the elementary schools adhered to the model; whereas, at the junior and senior high school level the proportions were 30% and 38% respectively. In addition to the apparent differences in organizational structure at the secondary levels, one possible interpretation of the varied success of the model at different educational levels might reflect the difference in attitudes toward the teaching of reading and differences in reading skills of concern at the elementary versus the secondary level. Though the differences were not significant, the trend suggests the hypothesis that the R2R process was more adaptable at the elementary level than at the junior and senior high levels. The lack of applicability of this assessment process at the secondary level was confirmed informally by our facilitators, one of whom developed his own alternative handbook for use at the secondary level. Similarly, the research and development programs seemed somewhat more frequently selected by elementary sites (56%) than by junior highs (10% selected research based programs). At the senior high level although 50% of the schools selected research based programs, only one of these was from the project's validated knowledge base. The other R&D selections made by high schools were found via searches beyond the project's knowledge base of programs.

Another aspect of fidelity to the model which is worthy of investigation is at which point the process did not work. The Right to Read process was claimed to be cumbersome and time consuming by some of the

task forces. Do the program selection criteria developed during this process provide any clue to the site's eventual difficulties in meeting the expectations of this model? The selection criteria were, in retrospect, judged "adequate" at 61% of the sites, and "too general" or non-existent at 39%. Perhaps a more thorough pre-assessment of readiness for this type of problem solving and change would have been appropriate in some of the instances where criteria for a program to be selected were not clearly stated before a selection was made. While group problem-solving is designed to provide a wide range of involvement of staff, it may be an alien process in many schools. Schools may need help in becoming ready for change. Skills in instructional planning by staff may be more limited than at first realized.

The Relationship of Selected Factors to Fidelity to the Model

Are there common characteristics of the schools which did not adhere to the Project model (N=21)? In only 4 of the 21 sites (19%) which did not follow the model did the school principal assume an active leadership role in project activities. Whereas, in sites which adhered to our process model the principal was in an active leadership position with the task force at 9 or 60% of the schools. In more than half of the cases where the principal was not actively involved in project activities the leadership was provided by a district level person rather than a building level person. In those cases it was not uncommon for the district level leader to make decisions regarding curriculum changes which appeared to ignore the activities of the planning group composed primarily of teachers. It was extremely rare that a district level person assumed a leadership role yet encouraged the group to come to a decision concerning the nature of the problem and the

program to be adopted. With district leadership often came constraints. Cooperative leadership with district and building persons working with the linker (facilitator) was evident in 7 of the 36 sites; one third of the sites which followed our model had such shared leadership and in all but one of those schools the principal was the task force chairperson. Thus, the role of the principal appears to have been crucial in the success of this project. Since the basic model calls for school-based task forces and documentation, it is clear that district level decision-making is not in conformity with this model as applied by the NRC. In one district efforts to set up building task forces were never successful; and the district-selected solution was chosen prior to entry into the project and applied to all four sites in that district. The district influence in decision-making at the building level is clearly significant as a factor differentiating these schools from sites which followed the Project model.

The Climate at the Project Sites

A detailed analysis of the climate at project sites indicated that most of the sites were plagued by some adversity such as levy failure, budget problems, key personnel transfer or resignation, teacher-union conflict or other organizational or interpersonal conflicts within the school district.

* 47% had levy failures just prior to or during the Project contract.
* 72% had turnover in key personnel during the Project (pr ncipal, superintendent, facilitator or key school contact person with Project).

* 55% had principal documentation of "community pressure as an important push to action in dealing with the problem."
* 44% had principal documentation of new laws as an important push to action.
* 92% of the sites had state accountability legislation which was viewed by the field consultant as bearing on Project activities (in the form of student learning objectives, graduation competencies, or assessment for accreditation or emerging legislation).

No pattern or interaction of the above adverse "conditions" could be isolated which differentiated the sites not adhering to the model from those which followed the model. Thus, the prevalence of situations such as high personnel turnover, or levy failure and subsequent budget problems should not be considered sufficient reason to deny a site participation in an instructional improvement project. It may well be that such a climate of adversity is common in schools today and is not unique to the experience of this project. On the other hand, neither should factors such as accountability legislation, released time for teachers to work on task forces, community pressure to improve programs, the services of an educational facilitator, money or a data bank of R&D programs be considered sufficient conditions for influencing a school to adhere to a prescribed process of problem solving.

Further efforts to analyze fidelity to this model include a look at the type of selections made by those not adhering to the model. Eight of 21 selected inservice, six selected a basal, five made no selection and 2 sites adopted other non-research based programs. Thus the rationale for inservice and staff development was in some cases that it met a more basic need of the site which may be preliminary to eventual selection of

a research and development based reading program. If this is true, we are again faced with the problem of how to identify sites prior to their entry into such a contract so that services of the capacity building or awareness type can be offered. Considerable exploration of the importance of the assessment of readiness emerged from this project's experience. See "Readiness for Instructional Improvement Planning Through Group Problems Solving Approaches" by Albert R. Haugerud. Several secondary schools which selected inservice were dealing with reading in the content areas. The project data base was considered by the facilitators to be insufficient in this problem area.

What are the characteristics of the sites which never made any selection at all (N=5)? At three sites internal district-level problems and teacher-union problems have been present; yet, "adequate" criteria were developed. Group problem-solving in curriculum development at the building level was a low priority at those sites. One other site not making a selection after three years did develop "adequate" criteria, but lack of principal commitment to the Project was viewed by the facilitator as "the problem" holding up the process. At the fifth site the district did not appear to want any intervention and neither did the principal. Thus it seemed that key gatekeepers were able to prevent project intervention. As was aptly summed up by Richard Carlson in his project report,

> "Revealed by the difficulties in obtaining project fidelity and the reasons offered for lack of fidelity are (a) the fidelity requirements, if met, demand a change in the usual composition of school decision makers, a change in the manner in which decisions are made, and a change in the type of solution accepted -- a change from commercial to research and development solutions, and (b) much resistance was mounted to these fundamental changes, and much activity was aimed at stability maintenance."

The socio-organizational dynamics of the district must be taken into account prior to entry. The conflicts present and the resistance to change may need to be dealt with prior to introducing a data bank or a prescribed selection process. This was borne out by data collected during the first phase of the project. An assessment of the climate for change was made by the linker (faciliator) at the time of the problem identification and setting of goals and objectives, prior to the selection of a program. The schools' ratings on the following two statements were suggestive:

1. "Those involved understand what is going on and what needs to be done."
2. "Those who are involved are committed to plans for making improvements in reading instruction successful."

The average rating on Statement 1 (Understanding) was higher for sites which were later judged to adhere to the prescribed model than for those who did not follow the model. So too, commitment to plan seemed greater at sites which followed this instructional planning model than at these sites with apparently conflicting agendas, timelines and priorities. More intervention to clarify project involvement through assessing and facilitating readiness at an earlier date might have been helpful. Had the research structure of the project not been to test a specific planning model, greater flexibility in readiness activities might have prevailed. Some efforts in this direction were made through the training efforts of the NWREL staff, but more extensive dialogue and diagnosis prior to entry is needed. The reader is referred to the paper on Readiness cited above.

Success in group instructional planning or improving reading programs cannot be measured only by strict adherence to all aspects of this model. The broader impact of this project can be seen in the numerous innovations adopted by participating schools. In total, 48 programs were adopted by 31 schools to solve their identified problem. Thus 86% of the schools implemented some program through participation in this project. Those innovations which were not research-based were often the most time consuming to plan and possibly the most appropriate solutions in those cases. The rationale for the selection of a non R&D innovation included the teachers' negative attitude towards research and positive attitude towards solutions "seen in operation" in other schools. A feeling of "uniqueness" was expressed by some task forces, referring to their situation as not being amenable to a packaged solution and needing a tailor-made program for their specific needs. In those cases new materials, and training programs were often developed to meet specific needs. Such total involvement of teachers in developing their own curriculum served to intensify the teachers' commitment when implementation began.

Summary and Implications

Fidelity to the model of using the Right to Read assessment procedures and reviewing a selected group of R&D programs (the Knowledge Base) was not widespread - 56% of the schools did not adhere to this model. Yet, where adherence to the model was evident, selection of an R&D program followed in 75% of the sites. This indicates the appropriateness of this model as one vehicle leading to the implementation of R&D programs in the schools. Caution is warranted in interpreting this relationship,

as the inability of 56% of the sites to follow this model coexisted with both human, technical and financial support which influenced other institutional planning activities. We might conclude that group problem-solving cannot be forced or easily coaxed; yet, perhaps the road can be paved for it if timelines and goals can be meshed. We can concur with the recent findings of the Rand study (p. 14) that the selection process does not consist of a "rational weighing of alternative educational treatment... We cannot offer any simple model of this selection process." In an atmosphere of conflicting pressures to change with various organizational, political and interpersonal conflicts prevailing in school districts, the ability or motivation of any group to make a decision using a prescribed process and a specific set of instructional choices becomes difficult without more preparation, capacity building, or staff awareness prior to beginning the problem identification. So too, the intervention by an outside person through the district office seems to take different forms which lead to varied success. In cases where the principal assumed a leadership role with the district's "blessing," the group problem solving process was more likely to be followed than in schools where the district level contact person assumed a leadership role. Yet analysis of the issues suggested that the point in time when adherence to the model might have been indicated was probably prior to entry into the project. Certainly the seeds of failure to pursue R&D outcomes were evident at the time of developing a problem statement. Fidelity to this model appears to be a function of a complex array of factors related to both the limitations of the model itself and the timelines, priorities, and leadership of those being served.

REFERENCES

Berman, P., McLaughlin, M.W. Federal Programs Supporting Educational Change. Implementing and Sustaining Innovations, Vol. 8. Santa Monica, California: The Rand Corporation, 1978.

Haugerud, A.R., Assessing school readiness as a precondition for effective instructional improvement planning, June 1979, unpublished paper.

Washington (State) Department of Education. Curriculum and Instruction Division. State of Washington Right to Read Assessment and Planning Handbook. Washington (State). Technical Resources Committee for Right to Read. Ad Hoc Committee. Curriculum and Instruction Division, Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1975.